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ITEM 5:* STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

FUTURE STATE-OF-THE-ENVIRONMENT REPORTING

Note by the Executive Director

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* Refers to the number of the item on the Provisional Agenda (UNEP/GC.17/1).

FUTURE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORTING

Introduction

1. General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972 requires the UNEP Governing Council to "keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments". To assist the Governing Council in this task, UNEP has established a system of reporting on the state of the world's environment. The types of reports prepared by UNEP are described in paragraphs 2 to 5 below.

Annual state-of-the-environment (SOE) reports

2. Annual SOE reports are currently prepared pursuant to Governing Council decision 10/I, Section II, which requested that the number of topics selected by the Council for the annual SOE report, starting at the eleventh session of the Governing Council (1983), be limited to one or, at most, two.

3. The Governing Council at its thirteenth session, in its decision 13/9D, decided that future annual SOE reports should alternate in successive years between a report on the economic and social aspects of the environment and a report on environmental data and assessment.

State of the world environment (every ten years)

4. At its twelfth session (1984) the Governing Council, in its decision 12/3C, decided that a comprehensive report on the state of the world's environment should be prepared every ten years.

Short reports for each session of the Governing Council

5. Reports on emerging environmental issues and on hazardous environmental events have been prepared pursuant to Governing Council decision 10/I, Section II (1982); 11/I, Section II (1983); and 12/3B (1984). In those decisions the Executive Director was requested to supplement the annual SOE reports with reports focusing on the most important environmental events and emerging issues since the preceding Governing Council session.

6. Despite the solid scientific content of the above reports, they did not become, as originally envisaged, the basis for policy deliberation in the Governing Council. At its sixteenth session the Council, in its decision 16/5, decided that in future only an executive summary of the relevant sate-of-the-environment report should be presented to it as a Governing Council document.

7. In addition to the state-of-the-environment reports, over the years UNEP prepared several comprehensive reports, technical assessments and environmental data compilations on a wide variety of issues, largely in the context of the Earthwatch process. The preparation of those reports involved several United Nations agencies and bodies, as well as other international organizations and scientific institutions.

8. Recent examples of comprehensive reports produced at regular intervals are:

- The World Resources report, currently produced by the World Resources Institute (WRI), UNDP and UNEP;

- The Environmental Data report, currently produced by UNEP through the Global Environment Monitoring System, (GEMS) Monitoring and

Assessment Research Centre (MARC), in asscciation with WRI and the Department of the Environment of the United Kingdom;

- Global Biodiversity: Status of the Earth's living Resources, compiled by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, a joint venture between the World Conservation Union (IUCN), UNEP and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

9. Examples of other technical assessments and environmental data compilations include:

- Chemical Pollution: A global overview, prepared by the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC) and GEMS/MARC;

- World Atlas of Desertification, prepared by the Desertification Control Programme Activity Centre (PAC), GEMS/PAC, the Global Resource Information Database/PAC and the soils Units in cooperation with other institutions;

- Global Freshwater Quality, prepared by the World Health Organization and UNEP.

PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE REPORTING

10. Agenda 21, in particular Chapter 40, "Information for decision-making", underlines the importance of an improved availability of information on all matters related to environment and development. It also underlines the need for improved presentation of data and information in a format that will facilitate decision-making by Governments.

11. To allow UNEP to fulfil better its mandated tasks as set out in Chapter 40 of Agenda 21, in particular in connection with state of the environment reporting, and in an attempt to stimulate substantive discussions on key environmental issues and other important findings and problems, the following new approach is proposed:

(a) A new document, the Executive Director's Statement on the Environment, is to be prepared and presented to each session of the Governing Council. The Statement will cover key environmental policy issues; major new sectoral environmental assessment findings and their implications for early warning; new environmental problems; exceptional environmental events of global significance; and action taken or under consideration;

(b) Every ten years (next due in 2002) UNEP will continue to prepare a comprehensive state of the world environment report, based *inter alia*, on the above reports, assessments and data compilations as well as on authoritative reports from other agencies and organizations concerned with the environment, sustainable development and related fields.

12. In addition, within the framework of Earthwatch, UNEP will continue to prepare or co-sponsor, on a regular basis and based on past experience, sectoral or topic-specific comprehensive scientific reports, assessments and environmental data compilations covering, amongst other topics, environmental pollution, the status of biodiversity and non-renewable resources, and the socio-economic aspects of environment and development.

13. Such reports should fulfil the primary needs of Governments and others with respect to reliable information on the state of the environment and its trends. Simplified publications along the lines of the UNEP/GEMS library series will also be prepared, based on the above reports and assessments and addressed to the general public and the media.

14. Of all the above reports, only the Executive Director's Statement on the Environment and an executive summary of the ten-yearly comprehensive state of the world environment report will be Governing Council documents. The Statement on the Environment will cover major environmental issues and events and set out the actions required to enable the Council to fulfil its role in keeping under review the world environmental situation. It is expected that the Statement, which will be more policy oriented than the other reports discussed above, will engender substantive discussions by the Council and consequently have a direct influence on the present and future work of UNEP and be of direct relevance to the programmes of other agencies and bodies of the United Nations system.

Costing

15. The preparation of the Executive Director's Statement on the Environment will cost the Environment Fund of UNEP a total of about $240,000 per year. This would include the collection and critical review of information and data, their subsequent evaluation and presentation in a format appropriate for submission to the Governing Council. This sum is broadly the same as the sum set aside in previous years for the preparation of annual state-of-the-environment reports.

16. The costs for the preparation of the comprehensive state of the world environment report (next due in 2002) are difficult to estimate at the present time. Extensive consultations will be held during 1993 to work out the content and framework of the report. This will allow the Executive Director to present to the Governing Council at its next session a more accurate estimate of the cost of production of the 2002 comprehensive state of the world environment report.